

Mid-East Probe Stymied

By Jack Steele



THE Senate investigation of Middle East policy has been stymied—at least temporarily—by the State Department's lavish use of a "top secret" stamp.

The inquiry was ordered early this year by the Foreign Relations and Armed Services committees before they agreed jointly to ratify the Eisenhower Doctrine.

A special sub-committee headed by Sen. J. William Fulbright (D., Ark.) was set up to assemble and study State Department documents relating to U. S. Middle East policies over the past decade.

The State Department has supplied the sub-committee with the first big batch of such papers—most of them relating to the ill-fated Aswan Dam project.

Sen. Fulbright, after a preliminary perusal of these documents, said today he had found them "very interesting and enlightening."

"The only trouble," he added wistfully, "is that practically all of them are stamped 'top secret'."

As a result, Sen. Fulbright said, "he can't figure out how the committee is going to proceed with its investigation."

OBVIOUSLY it can't hold public hearings to discuss the contents of the documents—unless the State Department agrees to declassify them.

It might call and question witnesses familiar with the papers, but they certainly would refuse to discuss them as long as the documents carry a "top secret" label.

The committee might, Sen. Fulbright noted, study the papers and hold secret hearings—and then put out a report stating its conclusions. But the report would have to skip the evidence on which the conclusions were based.

The committee can, and undoubtedly will, ask the State Department to declassify many of the documents. But that is likely to start a hassle which will still be going on long after the Middle East crisis has been forgotten.

SEN. FULBRIGHT, a veteran investigator, said he had never run into a similar problem before.

He insisted he is not willing to give up, but conceded he is open for suggestions how to proceed with the inquiry.

The committee is expected to meet in a week or 10 days to talk over the situation.

And Secretary of State John Foster Dulles may be invited to offer his suggestions—if he agrees not to laugh up his sleeve.